

**Gerald J. Perry, AHIP  
Medical Library Association  
2011–2012**



**Played right, baseball looks like the easiest game in the world. Roger Angell [1]**

Jerry Perry loves baseball. He even passed a mock test to be an umpire—just to see if he could do it. According to Jerry,

It's such a complicated, idiosyncratic game, with all the rules. Have you ever read the rules of baseball? The official rules are about 1.5 inches

thick. Anything can happen in a game...this past season, I witnessed a couple [of] "suicide squeezes"—not just one, but two in a couple of weeks. That's very rare.

That's why he likes being a librarian, too. Jerry says he loves "the idiosyncratic nature of questions. I don't recall ever getting the same question, especially clinical questions. Every day is new—it still is."

But if baseball were as easy and responsive to our wishes as we think it is, I don't think we would go back very often. It is this paradox—the obdurate difficulty and the steely demands of the game that lurk beneath its sunny exterior—that entrances us and makes us care. Roger Angell [1]

Jerry explains:

Of course, I've faced a few "bête noir" situations, and ironically it's because of them that I've come to learn to enjoy my problems—you could be miserable a lot of the time if you didn't. People come to us for help because they don't know the answer. We're always helping people with their problems; librarianship puts you in the position of a problem solver. I like the randomness and complications of doing that.

Jerry is known for saying things such as, "What a fabulous problem!" He teaches an MLA continuing education (CE) course, "The Librarian as Professional, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Complexity" [2]. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Gerald J. Perry did not start out to be a librarian. His childhood dream was to be a writer. With no particular type of writing in mind, he gravitated toward journalism. Working toward that goal in high school, he wrote a regular Sunday column for the *Niagara Gazette* about school happenings. In college, he was an infrequent campus newspaper contributor, writing about music events and personal essays, while attending the esteemed Newhouse School of Journalism at Syracuse University.

He earned a double major in journalism and anthropology in 1979 and notes, "They made sense together, anthropology is the study of people and journalism is writing about people." He considered earning a master's and doctoral degree in anthropology, but the

grant proposed to support his graduate work did not receive enough funding. That "wake up" moment convinced him not to follow a career dependant on grant funding. Instead, he supported himself as a freelance journalist and writer. Needing to supplement his freelance income, he applied for a library assistant job at Buffalo General Hospital. The hospital librarian, Wentsing Liu, the first of several mentors during his career, encouraged him to pursue a library career. Buffalo General Hospital helped pay for his graduate degree, completed in 1986 from the State University of New York at Buffalo.

**I'm not concerned with your liking me or disliking me...All I ask is that you respect me as a human being. Jackie Robinson [1]**

Of his career, Jerry says,

Taking the 30,000 foot view of my career—I've always had an interest and appreciation for "outsider" interests and advocacy. My published works, as I think about it, have always had that focus. I have tried to do that as a manager—advocate for staff and for the library—show where the library is filling a need.

Jerry was raised in what he describes as a "stunningly liberal family" of avid readers. His mother, a dedicated library supporter, took the family to their local library throughout his childhood. His parents were involved in Democratic Party politics. His siblings currently work in labor relations and university faculty politics, and a niece is involved with teachers' unions. Social justice remains a family value, as well as a personal one.

Recruited for his first professional job at University of Illinois at Chicago, he gained experience as a health sciences reference librarian, searching for clinical and research information. Through his growing network, he learned about what became his next position, the user education librarian at Rush University. The mentoring he received there created a career ladder that included working in reference and

collection development. Christine Frank, AHIP, remembers:

I was Jerry Perry's supervisor from 1988 to 1997, and it was an absolute joy. Besides being one of the most outstanding librarians I've ever known, he is also a lot of fun. He has a great sense of humor, and can find the bright side of even the darkest situation.

Jerry brought passion and thoughtfulness to everything he approached in the workplace. He was a big picture kind of guy, but meticulous about the details. He was a thoughtful leader who was expert in creating consensus among opposing views. As a manager, he worked hard at providing opportunities for his staff to grow professionally. And I always have admired his apparent unflappability.

It's been awhile since I've worked with Jerry, but I still take to heart any advice he might have on music, travel, food and cooking. [3]

While in Chicago, Jerry coedited three editions of the *AIDS Information Sourcebook* with Robert Malinowsky [4] and authored *The Impact of Political Agendas on the Delivery of Health Care: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography* [5].

Jerry's involvement as coconvener of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Health Science Librarians Special Interest Group (SIG) marked his entry into Medical Library Association (MLA) politics. The origins of the SIG lie in the publication of *Q++*, an alternative gay-centric guide to Chicago for the MLA annual meeting. Intended to complement the listing provided by the local arrangements committee, the popularity of *Q++* surprised even its authors and brought a shared community together. The benefit of helping the LGBT community find each other in MLA, concurrent with the development of online lists and discussion groups and what Jerry terms the "zeitgeist of the time"—the anti-gay legal activities occurring in cities and states across the country—led Jerry and others to ask why MLA and its chapters would hold meetings and spend money in these places.

According to Jerry, "That's what got me involved. I learned about

the governance of MLA by helping to create the SIG and getting involved in the Relevant Issues Section. My own interest in governance was fueled by taking advantage of opportunities to take a leadership role in order to work for social justice."

Brian Bunnett, AHIP, a longtime MLA friend of Jerry's, remembers:

I knew from the moment I first met Jerry that he was cut out for big things. It was May 1999. I was walking down Michigan Avenue in Chicago on the way to the Hyatt Regency, where the MLA [annual meeting] was held that year. A friend of mine, Tom Flemming, AHIP, from McMaster, introduced us and mentioned that Jerry was presenting five papers during the conference. I was astonished and asked him how he was going to carry this off. Jerry just laughed, shrugging it off as if it was the most normal thing.

That's Jerry for you. That laugh, first of all, that comes so readily to him. And then the shrugging it off, which is also characteristic. Five papers at one conference, no big deal. But those five papers—I still find that astonishing.

Fun to be with, doesn't take himself too seriously, plenty of varied interests (he's the only person I know who goes on vacation to Belfast), but, in the end, when I think of Jerry, there are always going to be those five papers. Incredible! [6]

After ten years in Chicago, Jerry was ready for the next challenge. The personal benefits of a move were attractive as well. Always a writer, Jerry met his partner, Garry Forger, aka "G," while attending a writers' workshop, the "OutWrite Conference." Jerry's next career move presented an opportunity to move their long-distance relationship into the same zip code. A friend in Tucson encouraged Jerry to apply for an opening at the Arizona Health Sciences Library (AHSL) as head of information services. Moving to a larger library where faculty had promotion through continuing status allowed Jerry to learn about faculty governance. Hannah Fisher remembers:

I worked with Jerry when he was head of information services at the



AHSL. I liked his management style. He would submit ideas and possible methods of how the final product could be obtained. Then he would listen carefully to what you said, you might disagree with the method and offer another suggestion. I always felt I could tell him anything and either agree or disagree. He didn't take it personally, and neither did I. Usually both of us had a sense of humor and neither party was defensive...He is very involved with national and state organizations and has worked tirelessly with various committees through the years. Usually for the December holidays, he would take the information services group out to lunch. He is very generous. [7]

In Arizona, he was the education coordinator for the Arizona Health Information Network (AZHIN), which included the state's major teaching hospitals and the corrections system. "I loved that work," Jerry said of providing instruction via telemedicine to staff champions in prisons and rural health care sites. "Most were not librarians but acted in the role of information providers."

He also served as a faculty instructor for the university's college of medicine faculty development program, where his interest in evidence-based health care (EBHC) began. He worked closely with Enrique Corvalan on changing the culture of University of Arizona's teaching faculty to instill EBHC teaching and critical appraisal skills in residency programs and students.

Engagement with the Mexican studies department on campus led to the library's inclusion in a Health Resources and Services Administration grant to build a Hispanic Center of Excellence focused on health sciences. Jerry provided instruction in EBHC and became the library's representative to the Arizona Hispanic Center of Excellence (AHCOE) Steering Team.

**There comes a time in every man's life, and I've had plenty of them. Casey Stengel [1]**

Several years in a row, Jerry and G helped coproduce the Tucson Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, which

promoted significant films in the LGBT genre. The experience was rewarding and challenging, working with a shoestring budget, while meeting the demands of different constituencies—film distribution groups, artists, the community, the director, and fundraising—and even getting food donations for events.

The couple combined volunteer work with their passion for hiking. As volunteers for the National Park Service, they assisted with a saguaro cactus census project and with a "repeat photography" project to photograph changes in vegetation over time. They continue to hike for pleasure, including multiple Thanksgiving holiday hikes of the Grand Canyon.

Sundays equal cooking for Jerry. He supplements his expert cooking experiments with produce grown in his local community garden plot. He regularly tries heirloom seeds and even ordered special garden worms that had to be incubated on his Denver town-home porch.

A punk rock and new wave music aficionado in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Jerry continues to enjoy an eclectic taste in music. His latest gadget is a Jenson turntable, which he uses to play used vinyl albums. "They must be used," he reports. "From someone's personal collection." Recent purchases include vintage Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd along with 1980s "gems" from Human League and The English Beat.

Meanwhile, back at the AHSL, Jerry's responsibilities had grown with a merger of reference and the learning resources center. He was now managing or mentoring about thirteen people, and he started to think about his next steps in the profession. He presented at annual MLA meetings, was active in SIG and section activities, and served on Section Council and the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* (JMLA) Editorial Board. He was elected to the MLA Board in 2002 and the Nominating Committee in 2007, and he served on the 2010 National Planning Committee for MLA '10.

**If you come to a fork in the road, take it. Yogi Berra [1]**

As one of five inaugural fellows for the 2002 National Library of Medicine (NLM)/Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) Leadership Fellowship program, he was paired with another outstanding mentor, Nancy Roderer, AHIP, director of the Welch Medical Library at John Hopkins University. The fellowship and his work with Roderer inspired him to set a goal to become a library director.

An opportunity for a new mentor relationship soon came into play. The health sciences library directors in the 4 Corners region meet regularly and bring together department leaders of each library. During one of those sessions, Jerry was introduced to Rick Forsman, FMLA, then director of the Denison Memorial Library at University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. In 2003, the deputy director position at Denison became available and presented the opportunity that Jerry sought to obtain experience with leadership of multiple departments in an academic health sciences library. Jerry reflects:

It gave me the opportunity to fully explore the concepts of "co-leadership" and "appreciative inquiry" with a larger team. I've tried to focus on looking at peoples' jobs and plans and craft with them a plan that appreciates and leverages their skills and interests—all to the benefit of the library.

The imminent move to the new health sciences library building on the developing University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus added more excitement to his new venture. Forsman retired three years later. After serving as interim director for a year, Jerry was appointed as director and led the library staff through the daunting task of moving to a new building. According to Jerry:

And it was a success!...I've tried to continue to demonstrate the value of the library on our new campus—working to imbed the library in projects throughout the campus. I believe the technique of proving our worth works.

Jerry mentions three highlights of his career thus far:

First was the realization that information I could provide could realistically impact someone's life. Doing searches for health care providers that could influence a life and impact the patient care decision was like an addictive drug—making a tangible difference. Second, I loved working with teaching faculty as part of my Arizona experience, teaching people who were using telemedicine in the corrections facilities, helping them provide evidence-based care. What a great project that was! And third, here in Colorado, building capacity in our library—learning how to be ready for the future. Not only did we as a library complete a physical move with a minimum of collateral damage, in fact, we moved with no major disasters and we've since flourished, enjoying a time of growth and expansion. We're enjoying a stage of reinvention that takes a village. And, if you want a "just" village, you have to articulate a vision for that, no matter how complicated and idiosyncratic that may be. I hope I've

encouraged a diversity of opinions in our library.

Jerry's intentions as MLA president were clear, even in his responses to questions as a candidate:

As an association, MLA needs to make it easier to be a contributing member. We need to rethink our meetings, leveraging technology so that more of us can participate. We need to figure out how to simplify engagement in MLA so that members will continue to renew and so that we can grow. And, we need to invest efforts in enabling each member to be a spokesperson for the profession. The results: a reimagined association better positioned to advocate for our future. [8]

I bet he'll hit one over the fence!

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